

Putin sets tough terms for Chechnya talks

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, SEPT. 7. Russia's President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, has set tough preconditions for peace talks with Chechen rebel leaders, which practically rule out such talks.

Responding to a call from a liberal parliamentarian for opening peace talks with Chechnya's separatist President, Mr. Aslan Maskhadov, Mr. Putin said negotiations were only possible on two conditions: "All bandit formations should lay down their weapons and particularly odious bandits who have Russian blood on their hands are handed over to us."

The preconditions, which are bound to be rejected by Chechens, made sound hollow Mr. Putin's abstract remark that "talks are always better than any military actions, and we are prepared to enter into contact with anyone."

Visibly annoyed by the talks appeal from Mr. Boris Nemtsov, leader of the liberal SPS party in Parliament, Mr. Putin said that unless the MP was able to persuade the Chechens to accept his conditions, he should "stop fid-

getting" and "surrender his parliamentary mandate." He was speaking on Friday while on a tour of Russian regions neighbouring Chechnya, timed to coincide with the 10th anniversary of separatists declaring Chechnya's independence from Russia.

Russia has made little progress in its second two-year-old military effort to crush rebel resistance in Chechnya, with scores of Russian troops dying every month in the breakaway region. Yet, Moscow appears to be short on new ideas as to how to resolve the Chechen stalemate.

The Russian President called for more responsibility for maintaining law and order in Chechnya to be handed over to Chechens loyal to Moscow.

"We will achieve nothing in Chechnya as long as we do not establish order there and as long as we do not allow Chechen people to work in the police organs and other special services," Mr. Putin said during a meeting with regional leaders in Kislovodsk, in the North Caucasus.

In the past few months rebels have killed about 50 pro-Moscow Chechen administrators and police, branding them as traitors.

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Putin approves missile black list

REUTERS

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MOSCOW, Aug. 9. — Russian President, Mr Vladimir Putin, approved the lists of goods and technology related to missiles and biological weapons over which the state will exercise tough export controls. The move may help address fears in Washington and elsewhere that post-Soviet Russia could be a source of powerful arms for hostile states as its vast and now impoverished armed forces and many thousands of weapons scientists struggle to make ends meet.

A Kremlin statement yesterday gave few details but said one presidential decree set down the list of controlled germs, toxins and genetically modified micro-organisms, related equipment and technology. A separate decree dealt with equipment, materials and technology which could be used to produce missiles.

The Kremlin statement gave no further details about the decrees, which were issued to specify a framework to implement a law on export controls passed by parliament in 1999. It didn't specify what items were on the various lists.

"The decrees have been signed to protect national interests, carry out Russia's obligations under the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Conventions and those concerning non-proliferation of missiles capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction," a Kremlin spokesman said.

THE STATESMAN

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Delicate choices before Putin

By Pran Chopra

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MOSCOW, AUG 2. For the Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin there is more at stake than the ABM in his dialogue with the U.S. President, Mr. George Bush which began in Slovenia. Its outcome can twist a delicate choice he must make soon, and a wrong turn can take him into wilderness. An election result declared on July 30 has reminded him of this possibility.

Mr. Putin has had time enough as President to consolidate his popularity and to make up his wish list. Now he must convert his popularity into effective power, because he stands on the threshold of a critical phase. The third year is crucial for a four-year president who is allowed only one more term. Therefore, he must decide now whether he wants to work for a second term or for a place in history. Or to gamble for both. The first choice calls for popular measures for a while and then early elections for a Duma which would reinforce his presidency instead of trying, as the present Duma, to be a rival centre of power. The second choice calls for doing what the country needs most, whatever the electoral consequences. The third, despite the risk of falling between two stools, means giving bitter pills for 12 months and then some sweets for making the fourth year a platform for a second term.

Until he met Mr. Bush in Slovenia Mr. Putin had such a high public rating that he could either use it for taming the existing Duma despite the strong communist presence in it, or for getting a new one elected which would not try to resist him. He chose well, and Duma passed most government Bills without mauling them too much. In the meantime, he has also been able to stitch a party alliance behind him, which he did not have when he won his first Presidency. More important, he has been able to make a start with that which Russia lacked in

the Yeltsin years, and for lacking which it had lacked everything — stability, confidence and the beginnings of a sense of pride in itself.

But that has not been the result of his policies, whether intended or implemented. It has been the result of his personality. He is rightly seen and admired as sincere, energetic, brisk without being hasty, daring to stand up to those upon whose patronage Mr. Yeltsin had become dependent in his later years, and all that has given him the benefit of a strong synergy between his images at home and abroad. The more the Russian people show confidence in him the higher he rises in the eyes of the world, and the more that happens, the more Russia rallies around him. That is how he was able to

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do a lot in the first half of the first term.

But a huge lot more remains for him to do yet because of the basket of vipers Yeltsin handed him. The flight of capital continues because corrupt oligarchs remain powerful. The country remains divided between the very rich and the very poor, between Moscow and the regions. The path of democracy is still rocky. A unified and unifying federal system is not in place as yet. Nor a genuinely multi-layered party system which alone can sustain it. Chechnya still festers. Little of the foreign investment is going into industrial economy or the infra-structure. Consumerism is rampant in Main Street, Moscow, and so much of what is consumed is imported that repatriation of profits from the sale of luxury goods is still adding to the outward flow, while taxes are being kept low to keep investors happy no matter what they invest in. The time is now for a sound strategy of development and specific policies to back it.

But this is precisely when the synergy may falter. Ever since Slovenia, Mr. Bush's people

have been parading four placards in Moscow. One, America is going ahead with NMD even if it means discarding ABM. Two, not much time can be spared or is needed for negotiations with Moscow because there is nothing much to negotiate. Three, the gap between the two countries is narrowing, which in the context only means Mr. Putin is coming along and the rest is postures. Four.

There are economic sticks and carrots for Russia, which the U.S. Commerce and Trade Secretaries brought along to Moscow just when Ms. Condoleezza Rice was here with her charm and arguments. But if anything is known publicly, it is that Mr. Putin is far from coming along. He made this as clear as can be in a superb press conference immediately after Slovenia. The full text has to be seen for his grasp of issues and detail and polite but firm rebuttals. But people will soon ask who is kidding whom, and either Mr. Putin's credibility will take a knock or the synergy. In the meantime, the communists will drum up Bush bashing for all they are worth, and what they are worth they have just demonstrated. In their first win in the important province of Nizhny Novgorod, they have won the governorship by a big margin, defeating the incumbent Governor who was backed by the Unity Party, the only party which fully backs Mr. Putin.

A resolution of Russia's dilemma lies only in three possibilities. One. Technical failure of NMD. Two. Such opposition to it by Europe that Russia is seen in good company, not only China's. Three. Russian technologies can nullify America's NMD advantage at an affordable cost. The first two are outside Russia's control. The third remains to be seen. Therefore, if a second term for Mr. Putin is at stake, then also at stake is his hope to be remembered as the maker of post-Soviet Russia.

(Concluded)

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Moscow fears federalism

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By Pran Chopra

MOSCOW, AUG 1. No country of comparable significance needs a federal system as much as Russia. This is because of the variety, size and spread of its regions, their contiguity with so many countries, ranging from the heart of central Europe to Islamic Asia to the entirely different world of China, Korea, and Japan.

There is no known system of governance which can better encompass so much within a single country than a federation can. But federalism also faces more inhibitions in Russia than in most countries, some inherited from the Czarist past, some from Stalinist communism, more from the blunder driven concluding years of Mr. Yeltsin, and some which are being generated now due to the fear that federalism may feed separatism. From the first Czar to the time when, in 1990, the communist party was dismantled without preparing alternative structures, Russia has had a long history of all authority being concentrated in Moscow. That imperial stretch weakens Moscow's hold over the country, and today it is certainly weak. But it remains incompatible with the essence of federalism, a mutually understood and accepted partnership between the federal centre and the constituents of the federation.

The disastrous decade of the Yeltsin rule presented Russian federalism with its worst crisis. In 1990, Mr. Yeltsin gained control of the Russian Republic, which was itself a federation and also the richest and most powerful part of the Soviet federation. And the first thing he did was to start a mutually destructive collision between the Soviet Union and the Republic. The collision destroyed the Soviet Union but it also made the Republic a pauper, and aggravated those very fears of federalism for which democratic federalism is the best remedy.

By withholding large amounts that the Russian Republic owed the Soviet Union, Mr. Yeltsin threatened to ruin the Union financially. In an effort to save the

Union, its President, Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev, drew up a well thought-out federal constitution for the Union as a whole, and won overwhelming approval for it in a referendum in March 1991. But Mr. Yeltsin proclaimed the Russian Republic as sovereign, and created a precedent which was to be quickly followed by the Baltic and Central Asian republics. As a result, the successor State, the present Russian Federation (RF) was crippled at birth.

Mr. Yeltsin became President of the Russian Federation in an election in 1993, which has been widely shown to have been fraudulent. But nemesis followed. Just as he had led the Russian Republic into a revolt against the Soviet Union, Mr. Yeltsin was confronted by the local bosses of many constituents of the RF with demands for more sovereignty. To gain their support for a second term as the RF President, Mr. Yeltsin promised them "as much sovereignty as you can eat."

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When that too did not resolve the sovereignty issue, he put aside the federal provisions of the Constitution he had promulgated in 1993 and proceeded to sign "treaties" with more than half the 89 constituents, the terms of each being determined by no established principles but by the political or economic bargaining power of each side in each situation.

They — and particularly the "treaties" with Tatarstan and Bshkortostan, the most assertive of the constituents after Chechnya — violate the Constitution's requirements about what Moscow and a constituent must do where they have joint jurisdiction. In some cases where the jurisdiction was joint under the RF Constitution it was entrusted exclusively to a constituent, and where it was exclusively the Federation's, such as in relations with foreign powers, it was made joint. Such is the maze of sovereignties in which the President, Mr. Vladimir Putin now finds himself, and

it has become the biggest single challenge to his highest single domestic priority. On becoming President he had declared there would be a dictator now, but his name would be Law, meaning that Mr. Yeltsin's ad hocisms and rule by decree by earlier regimes would be replaced by clear and justiciable laws. But the beneficiaries of these treaties are so entrenched now that each has to be eased one by one out of the local tangle. For doing so, Mr. Putin has divided the Russian Federation into seven districts, and put each under the charge of a high-powered deputy hand picked by him. Success has come in a few cases but only a few.

In the meantime, Mr. Putin has made a mistake which might inhibit the long term and only real basis of Russia's unity, that each constituent should have such a strong sense of being a partner in the governance of the whole country that it may neither have reason to resist the centre nor wish to opt out of the country. Only democratic federalism can ensure that, by providing that authentic representatives of each constituent, elected by the local entities, have the opportunity to participate in the governance of the whole federation alongside federal level parties, while federal level parties have the opportunity to participate in the governance of the constituents, thus binding the whole polity in a web of the obligations of democratic federalism.

A new law recently promoted by Mr. Putin virtually prohibits constituents from forming their own parties. It requires each party to have so much membership in so many constituents that it bans any party which represents the constituents of one region. Fortunately, a new move is afoot, that federal parties may contest local elections in a constituent. That will force federal parties to compete for the support of local entities and will give the latter a chance to get some quid pro quo at the federal level. But that will take time, and the time taken will be time lost.

Russia takes two steps closer to democracy

By Pran Chopra

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MOSCOW, JULY 31. A few days ago Russia took two long steps closer to democracy. In mid-July a consolidation occurred in centrist politics which will put Russia more firmly on the Left-centre-Right spectrum of democratic politics. At the same time the President, Mr. Vladimir Putin signed into law a political parties Bill which is calculated to keep the spectrum clear of the clutter of parties that are only fragments and splinters.

The latest elections for the Duma, the Lower House of the Russian Parliament, in December 1999, as well as for the presidency, in January, 2000, had shown a severe imbalance. The far Left showed much greater strength than the far Right and the centre-Right and centre-Left were so divided that they barely held their own. At the start of the Presidential race, Mr. Putin had a rating of only two, the communist leader, Mr. Gennady Zyuganov 26, and Mr. Yevgeny Primakov, founder of the left-of-centre Fatherland party and former Prime Minister, had a rating of 19. Later, Mr. Primakov withdrew, for reasons which remain unclear, Mr. Putin's image as the Chechnya war hero shone burnished by a brilliant campaign run by his Minister for Emergencies, Mr. Sergei Shoigu, and he won with 53 per cent of the vote. But Mr. Zyuganov still managed to get 29 per cent. In the Duma elections, the far Left polled 28 per cent, far Right 15 per cent, and the centre-Left and Right 37 per cent.

This is not surprising in a country in which the death rate is rising; GDP growth rate is falling; well over a third of the population lives below the subsistence level; "reforms" hurt

more people than they benefit; many of the natural leaders of the far Right, the very rich, are too corrupt to attract voters; and the middle class is a rising force but has not risen enough yet. The next calamity or scandal can tip the country into the lap of those who are suspected of wanting to take it back to the days of the State-controlled economy which was strong on social security.

The scene must be daunting for Mr. Putin. He may want a more cooperative Duma which will support his middle-of-the-road vision of reforms. But to get that he needs a party system which would be stronger in the middle. His managers tried to get that at the beginning of June this year but failed. They succeeded this mid-July with the strategic consent of the highly successful and Mayor of Moscow, Mr. Yuri Luzhkov, the second most powerful man in Fatherland. He accepted partnership with Unity, a

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party of the middle Right which is strongly backed by Mr. Putin. With this backing the President got a Bill through Duma to forestall what has happened in many countries — when a long reigning single party, even if democratic, goes into decline, numerous parties mushroom and the electoral arena gets cluttered up. The new Act provides that for filling the 50 per cent Duma seats which are filled by the lists system, a party must "register" first, wait a year to be "recognised", then prove it has topped prescribed membership and spread thresholds and in the direct elections the result can be set aside if the voter turnout is less than 25 per cent or if all candidates have been "rejected" by more

voters than have voted for any one candidate. There are also more stringent and detailed rules about the source of funds. It is easy to see that under this Act a party which is "national" but very minor will not get far. Nor will a party get much "national" play if it is confined to one or two member-States of the federation, because it will have no "recognised" members in the Duma. The latter aspect has a defect but it is clear that with only sizeable parties as sizeable players, the socio-political and economic contours of the electorate will stand out more clearly and become more influential, and the Duma will have a better chance to reflect the total electorate much better. As it is, there is talk of some rearrangement of marriages which were arranged in the sudden rush for the last Duma and Presidential elections. Younger communists, a hard core Left but not with the old Stalinists' aversion to "too much democracy" might put hands across the fence to Mr. Primakov's followers in Fatherland and the scattered lot of democratic socialists who are looking for home. On the Right, the modern conservatives may seek alternatives to the adventurous new capitalists who have been dislodging the buccaneering old "oligarchs" from the gigantic State monopolies as they are privatised. The latter are about the worst of the many bad legacies Mr. Yeltsin has left behind for Putin. The pot will boil more if Putin pursues an idea he is supposed to harbour — advance the next elections to the Duma if he can while the present wave for him holds. But all such possibilities only feed into the main possibility, that as the wheel of elections turns, democracy will stir Russia more than it has ever done.

THE HINDU

TELETYPE

- 1 AUG 2001

RUSSIAN BUS HIJACKED, TALKS UNDERWAY

BY YURI BAGROV

Mineralnye Vody (Russia), July 31: Gunmen seized a bus carrying at least 40 people in Southern Russia and demanded the release of five Chechens jailed on hijack charges. At least two people were injured, Russian officials said.

The gunmen also demanded safe passage to the airport at Mineralnye Vody, and the bus, which had been heading toward a different city, went there instead. It was stopped on a highway just outside the airport, which was sealed off and ringed with troops, fire trucks and ambulances. A special anti-terrorist squad was sent to the airport. The red and white bus was parked on an overpass near the airport with its curtains drawn. Two windows were broken, and people peeked out from behind the curtain to brush away fragments of glass from the edge of the window. The gunmen were demanding the release of five Chechens currently serving jail terms for a may 1994 bus hijacking in the same region, Igor Trubitsyn, spokesman for the Stavropol branch of the federal security service, said. Trubitsyn said the hijackers were armed with one grenade, one kilogram of TNT and one submachine gun. Passenger Viktor Zhukov, 26, was



ACTION: In this image taken from NTV (Russian television network), Russian Special Forces officers and officials look at the hijacked bus on the bridge near the airport at Mineralnye Vody, in Russia's northern Caucasus region, on Tuesday. Gunmen seized a bus carrying at least 40 people and demanded the release of five Chechens jailed on hijack charges. (AP)

shot while on the bus and hospitalized after the hijackers released him in Nevinnomyssk, a duty officer for the federal security service in Stavropol said.

Four other passengers, two women and two children, were released before the bus departed from Nevinnomyssk in the Stavropol region, the duty officer said. He declined to give his name. He said officials believed there were 41 people on the bus, including the hijackers.

A police official in the mission conducting the negotiations said nine other hostages were freed on Tuesday afternoon. He gave no details. As the temperature soared past 38° C, an airport doctor, Margarita Karishnina, was allowed on to the bus. "I was there attending to people with heart problems, giving injections, medicines," she said. Maj. Gen. Valery Kavtasev, a senior ministry of emergency situations official, said there were two hijackers and that one of them had been given a radio to hold talks. He said food would be sent to the bus for the hostages.

"The criminal is excited, and it is necessary to act in such a way to prevent involuntary actions on the part of the criminals," interior minister Boris Gryzlov said in televised remarks from Novosibirsk. (AP)

THE OREGON JOURNAL
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Opium, the new religion

UNDER A torrent of narcotics gushing in from Afghanistan and Central Asia, Russia is fast succumbing to the scourge of drug abuse and the related spread of AIDS. Drug addiction has jumped 20-fold in the country over the last 10 years, with 4 million to 5 million of Russia's 146-million population using drugs, half of them considered addicts, according to official estimates. Independent researchers say there are no reliable statistics and cite 10 million drug users and five million or six million addicts.

The explosive rise in drug abuse came after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The ensuing economic and social crisis has wrought havoc with the lives of millions, pushing many to seek solace in drink and drugs. Over the same years, Afghanistan has emerged as the world's biggest producer of drugs, leaving far behind the Golden Triangle in South East Asia and Latin America. Afghanistan today accounts for three-fourths of the world's heroin supply, according to U.N. estimates. The bulk of

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The economic and social crisis ensuing from the collapse of the Soviet Union has pushed many to seek solace in drugs. **Vladimir Radyuhin on Russia's scourge.**

Afghanistan-produced drugs has been channelled in recent years through the porous borders of the former Soviet Central Asia to Russia and further on to Europe, as Iran effectively curbed drug-trafficking across its territory to South Europe.

Russia, initially a transit route between Central Asia and Western Europe, has now become the world's fastest growing drug market. Availability of drugs and their relative cheapness are the main factors contributing to the rapidly growing incidence of narcotics use in Russia. One gram of heroin in Moscow costs just \$30 to \$40 while in the West it goes for \$180. The Russian Interior Ministry estimates that the share of drugs transiting Russia to Europe has dropped from 60 per cent five years ago to less than 6 per cent today, with 94 per cent consumed in Russia. In Moscow

alone, drug peddling brings up to \$1 billion in profits a year. The *Izvestia* daily assessed the annual turnover of drugs in Russia at \$30 billion. In addition to heroin from Afghanistan, there is cocaine from Latin America and synthetic drugs from Europe.

Drug addiction is spreading fastest among young people. Dr. Grigory Potemkin of the AMITI Institute, which specialises in preventive treatment of drug and alcohol addiction, says that four out of five young Russians are familiar with drugs in many regions, including Moscow. Drugs are freely sold at discos and night clubs and peddled in practically all Moscow schools. The rector of Russia's most prestigious Moscow State University, Mr. Viktor Sadovnichy, admits that a "structured network of drug dealers" is active among his 40,000 students. Each addict attracts 10 to 17 people to the habit during one year. Towns and villages which have the misfortune of sitting on the main roads leading from Central Asia to Russia's western borders, are the worst hit. Some of them have close to 100 per cent incidence of drug addiction among young people.

Skyrocketing use of drugs has led to an explosion in HIV/AIDS incidence, which jumped from

420,000 to 700,000 in a single year in 2000. And that is just the beginning. "If the current rate of infection continues, half the country's population will be infected with HIV within a decade," said Dr. Vladimir Pokrovsky, head of the National Centre for the Fight Against AIDS.

The Deputy Health Minister, Mr. Gennady Onishchenko, warned that Russia's very future was at stake. "AIDS may cause the death or dissipation of the nation," he said.

The President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, has described the narcotics problem as a "national security threat", while the Prime Minister, Mr. Mikhail Kasyanov, said drugs were ruining a whole "generation which is due to take over from us".

Much of the problem lies outside Russia's reach. Economic dislocation in the newly independent states of Central Asia has made drug trafficking the only way of earning a living for thousands, if not millions. Drug couriers from Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan do not need a visa to travel to Russia.

Despite the enormity of the problem, Russia is yet to set up a mechanism for combating drug abuse. "Out of three essential conditions required to effectively combat drug addiction, Russia

has none," says Dr. Vladimir Prokopenko, Deputy Chairman of the International Anti-Narcotics Committee. "It lacks political will, financial resources and scientific potential."

Two national programmes to fight drug abuse adopted in 1995 and 1997 never took off for lack of funding. A law passed three years ago targets not so much drug dealers as addicts by making the use, distribution and transport of even the most microscopic amounts of drugs punishable by a prison sentence. Enormous profits enable drug traffickers to bribe police. In some cities, such as Yekaterenburg in the Urals, the Russian mafia has launched its own war on drug dealers, fearing that narcotics would kill off all its potential recruits.

"Government efforts to combat drugs are about as effective as trying to put out the Chernobyl reactor fire with a glass of water," said Dr. Prokopenko.

Experts predict a further spread of drugs in Russia. "We are heading for an 80 per cent nationwide incidence of drug use among young people," says Dr. Potemkin of the AMITI Institute, adding an optimistic note of sorts: "Thereafter drug addiction will begin to subside, because it has never registered higher levels anywhere in the world".

Halt Chechnya war, Moscow urged

MOSCOW, MAY 17. European Union officials on Thursday pushed Russia to switch from dollars to euros in Russia-E.U. commerce and promised more investments and trade — but also urged an end to Russia's military campaign in Chechnya.

Russia currently gets paid in dollars for its oil and gas exports to Europe, and the E.U. wants to pay in euros instead. The two sides signed a joint statement agreeing to talk more about the issue. Mr. Romano Prodi, Chairman of the European Commission, hailed the proposal as "a very significant initiative, and both the E.U. and Russia will benefit from it." "It is a clear sign of commitment to closer relations between the E.U. and Russia," Mr. Prodi said at a press conference with the President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, Mr. Javier Solana, E.U. Foreign Policy and Security Commissioner, and the Swedish Prime Minister, Mr. Goran Persson.

Mr. Prodi said use of the euro would help boost European trade and investment in the Russian economy. Russian officials, however, said little publicly about the idea. European leaders repeated criticism of how Russia has conducted the war with rebels in Chechnya.

The two sides agreed in a joint statement that a political solution to the war is needed, but Russia has shown little willingness to talk with rebel leaders, no one of whom is clearly in charge of the resistance. The leaders also discussed issues ranging from West Asia and the Balkans to trade, defence and E.U. enlargement — a sign of the increased emphasis Russia is putting on relations with Europe under Mr. Putin. That is a switch from his predecessor, Mr. Boris Yeltsin, who placed more emphasis on relations with the United States.

"The institution of interactions between Russia and the E.U. has repeatedly shown its efficacy," Mr. Putin said at the start of talks in the Kremlin's ornate Catherine Hall. "At their roots lie common civilizational roots, as well as trade, economic and cultural links between European countries and Russia that have existed for many centuries." — AP

Ivanov for U.S.

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, MAY 17. The Russian Foreign Minister, Mr. Igor Ivanov, is travelling to Washington to prepare for a bilateral summit meeting, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said here.

During his three-day visit to the United States, Mr. Ivanov is likely to be received by the President, Mr. George W. Bush, to become the first Russian official to meet the American leader.

The visit signals a certain warming in Russian-American relations. Mr. Ivanov's main agenda in Washington will be to prepare a summit between the Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, and Mr. Bush, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Mr. Alexander Yakovenko, said in Moscow. The meeting is expected to take place in mid-June, during Mr. Bush's tour of Europe.

Mr. Ivanov's talks in Washington will centre on U.S. missile defence talks. Foreign Ministry sources said Mr. Ivanov will warn American partners against hasty and mistaken decisions that can undermine strategic stability. Moscow said it was unconvinced by U.S. arguments for Mr. Bush's missile defence plans, set forth by the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defence, Mr. Paul Wolfowitz, during his visit to Russia last week. However, Moscow said it was ready to continue consultations.

Right now, it's only bad news for struggling journalists in Russia

ANDREW HIGGINS
MOSCOW

PAVEL Lobkov, dressed in a sombre suit as if for a funeral, hauled down a framed portrait of himself grinning from the studios of what, until a few hours earlier, had been Russia's only national television network not tied to the state. Along with dozens of other glum journalists from NTV, set up in 1993 by tycoon Vladimir Gusinsky, he then stalked from the building, the smiling photograph under his arm.

"I don't care about Gusinsky. I don't care about (Boris) Jordan," he said, referring to the American financier who had just taken charge of the network on behalf of state-dominated OAO Gazprom. "I care about my profession." Journalism, he said, had become "indecent."

But now, like many others caught up in a bitter struggle for control of Russia's media, the 33-year-old reporter isn't sure what to do. Some fellow NTV rebels have decided, reluctantly, to join TV6, a channel owned by Boris Berezovsky, a Russian mogul who, like Gusinsky, used to be close to the Kremlin, fell out of favour and now lives in exile abroad. Others who stormed from NTV in protest on April 14 have quietly drifted back.

Lobkov, wary of a new NTV management beholden to Russia's gas monopoly but queasy about joining a channel controlled by Berezovsky, retreated to his country dacha for a break.

"It's like after a stroke: You need to lie down and recover," he explained. "The choices are all bad. There is no such thing as real TV news anymore."

His dilemma reflects a deeper uncertainty about Russia's direction under President Vladimir Putin. For both allies and foes of Gusinsky, the dismantling over the past week of Russia's biggest private media empire marks a turning point.

But where to? One side sees a Kremlin-orchestrated assault on press freedom. The other sees the triumph of economic discipline over "oligarchic" influence-peddling.

In contrast to docile state-controlled media, NTV and other outlets run by Gusinsky's Media-Most excelled at probing the foibles of Russian leaders and flaws in their policies.

But while doing so, they planted the seeds of their own destruction: debts of over \$800 million, mostly to state or state-affiliated bodies such as Gazprom, whose chairperson is a senior Kremlin official. Russia has lost some of its most boisterous media voices.

NTV, hit by mass defections, is struggling to put out programs. *Sevodnya*, a respected daily paper, has been shut down, while the weekly

news magazine *Itogi*, set up by Gusinsky in collaboration with Washington Post Co.'s *Newsweek*, has announced plans to relaunch as a Russian version of *Paris Match*, a glossy digest of crime stories and celebrity fluff. *Newsweek* has pulled out.

Like other media outlets founded or funded by rival business groups after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Gusinsky's media were tethered to their owner's own interests and were never truly independent. But they

All three national TV networks are now within the state's orbit of influence.

Gazprom, which owns 46 per cent of NTV and holds a further 19 per cent as collateral for a loan, says it has no political agenda and merely wants to protect its investment.

Its concern over NTV's finances, however, contrasts with its unconcern for the losses of other media properties it controls, such as *Trud*, a daily newspaper with few readers, fewer advertisers and a reputation for skirting sensitive issues.

"What we're seeing is the establishment of absolute control over the country's media and political life. It's not the beginning of totalitarianism, but the creation of a highly centralised authoritarian system," says Igor Malashenko, a Media-Most director and close associate of Gusinsky. He says the recent blows to Gusinsky's empire follow an internal report by Russia's domestic intelligence service warning that Putin's popularity rating, hovering around 70 per cent, will slump as rapid economic growth slows.

This, says Malashenko, is why "Putin wants to establish full control...as soon as possible."

Others, though, applaud what they see as the end of the chaotic feuding of Yeltsin's rule, when Gusinsky, Berezovsky and other moguls known as "oligarchs" battled to influence policy and grab Soviet-era assets.

Tatyana Mitkova, a star NTV anchor who, unlike most of the station's big names, decided to stay on, describes the end of Gusinsky's control of the network as a "painful but positive step." It could, she says, show that "Russia is really changing — that the wild capitalism we built in recent years is being replaced by normal, civilised development."

NTV colleagues who quit vilify Mitkova as a sellout. Such accusations hurt, says the anchor, who, as a news reader on Soviet television, first made her name by re-

fusing to read Communist Party-scripted bulletins about a bloody crackdown in Lithuania. She was hauled off the air.

She says she decided to keep reading news on NTV because she was fed up with Gusinsky's using the channel in his battle with creditors.

"We are in a postrevolutionary era," says Pavel Lobkov in his dacha. He misses the vibrant political debate of the Yeltsin era but says Russia's media can't bring it back. He says he may eventually go back to NTV, "to cover truffles and flowers."

(From The Wall Street Journal)



For both allies and foes of Vladimir Gusinsky, the dismantling of Russia's biggest private media empire is a turning point. Some see a Kremlin-orchestrated assault on press freedom, the other, a triumph over influence-peddling. Russia is really changing — the wild capitalism built in recent years is being slowly replaced by normal, civilised development

did break a state monopoly on information and helped ensure a plurality of different, if sometimes biased, news.

The Kremlin denies any role in their demise but has set in motion broad changes that, in the 16 months since Putin took charge, are reshaping Russia's political landscape.

In parliament, policy-making and now the media, the highly public and often bitterly ideological debates of the Boris Yeltsin era are giving way to quiet and consensus.

A pro-Kremlin political bloc, joined by three parties that previously opposed it, dominates the legislature.

Russia state firm takes control of NTV network

Moscow, April 14: The self-proclaimed new managers of Russia's only nationwide independent television network on Saturday took over NTV, changing the security guards, firing journalists who refused their authority and cutting off the morning news in the midst of the broadcast.

The first real sign of the impact of the seizure of NTV's airwaves came at 8:06 am when anchor Andrei Norkin was cut off in mid-sentence as he attempted to explain just what had happened when the new managers arrived at the station early Saturday morning.

The new managers are led by American financier Boris Jordan, who has warned banks not to deal with the channel until he

can move in as the station's head and complete a takeover by natural gas giant Gazprom. Jordan showed up on Saturday, determined to move into his office.

NTV claims the Kremlin is behind the takeover of the feisty station, which has provided the country with some of Russia's most critical coverage of the war in Chechnya as well as important corruption scandals and the deterioration of the country's living standards. NTV is Russia's only nationwide network not controlled by the government.

For many, the battle has shaped up as the biggest test for freedom of speech in Russia since the Soviet collapse in 1991. Others say it is a legitimate fight over proper-

ty rights in a nation where nearly everything belonged to the state until 10 years ago. Early on Saturday, a so-called commission on the transfer of property arrived shortly before dawn at NTV's offices to take control of the network. Alexei Kondulikov, an NTV correspondent said. The security guards on the 8th floor of the office building where NTV is located were abruptly changed.

Mr Kondulikov said NTV was not allowed to begin broadcasting its early morning program in the Russian far east, which should have gone on the air several hours before the station begins broadcasting in Moscow. NTV went on the air in Moscow at 8:01 am in Moscow, with

footage of journalists milling around trying to figure out what to do. Anchor Andrei Norkin was reading a news broadcast when the screen went blank. Mr Norkin was broadcasting from TNT, a smaller channel that also belongs to media-most, over the NTV channel.

Two hours later, the 10 am news on NTV was read by a journalist who recognises Gazprom's authority. Rival NTV journalists aired an Opposition broadcast on TNT. Both stations ran regular programming between the newscasts.

Leading NTV journalists who refuse to recognise the new management took down large pictures of themselves that had hung in the halls and left the building after sign-

ing a statement they were leaving the station. Some technical personnel also quit and all together went over to the TNT offices across the street.

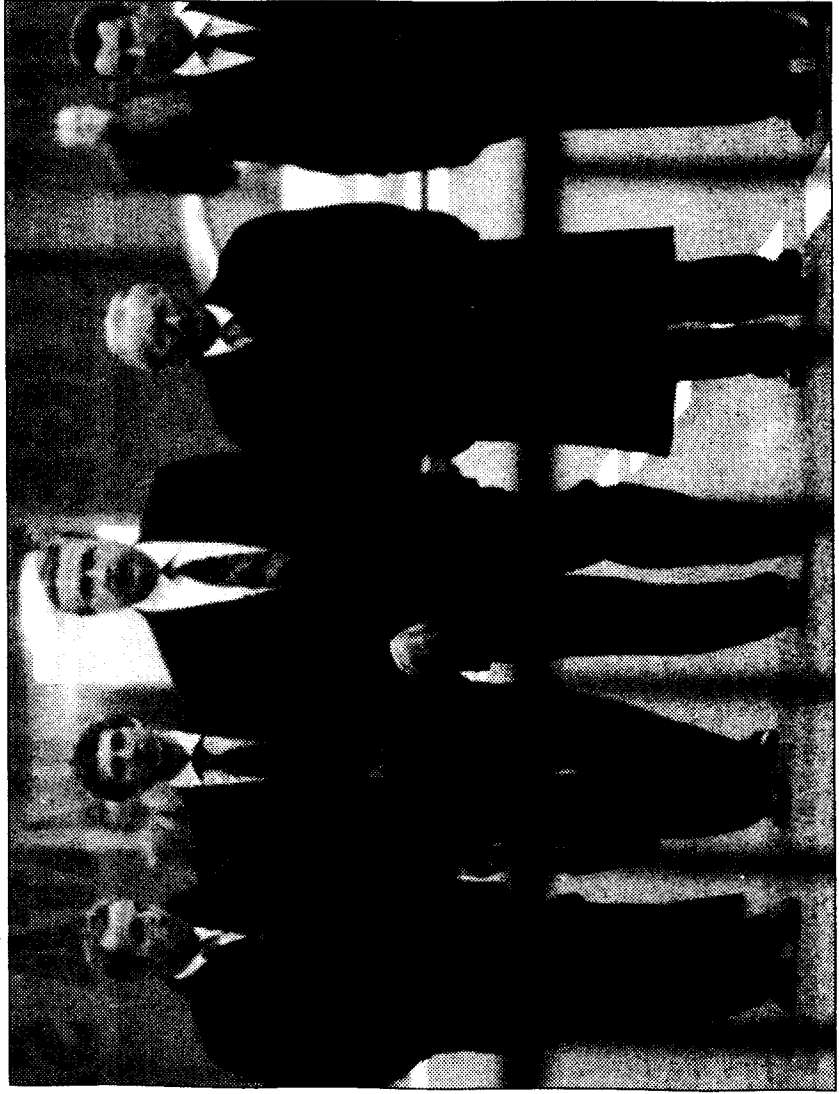
Meanwhile, dozens of NTV journalists signed a collective letter of resignation on Saturday after Russia's state-owned energy company Gazprom took over the independent national television network overnight. More than 30 out of a total 400 journalists signed the letter, Interfax news agency reported. "we were left with no other choice," said the popular news reader Svetlana Sorokina. Journalists are refusing to recognise the new management team under the newly installed director Boris Jordan. (AP, DPA)

Bush, Putin may meet next summer

Moscow, April 14: A possible summit between the Presidents of Russia and the United States during the G-8 deliberations was discussed at a meeting between the head of the Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov and US secretary of state Colin Powell.

This was revealed on Friday by Mr Ivanov while speaking at a Duma international committee meeting, *Novosti* reports.

Mr Ivanov said this was discussed during his meeting with Mr Powell on Thursday in Paris. The minister said they discussed the possibility of the leaders of Russia and the United States meeting during the G-8 summit in Genoa next summer. At the same time, Mr Ivanov said during their conversation, he and the US secretary of state "did not rule out that Mr Vladimir Putin and Mr George Bush might meet even before that." Mr Ivanov also said that the US secretary of state had handed him a personal invitation to visit Washington in May and start a concrete discussion. (UN)



OFF TO RUSSIA: Former Kremlin aide Pavel Borodin (third from left), in Switzerland to face money-laundering charges, walks surrounded by his four Swiss lawyers to Russia's diplomatic mission in Geneva on Wednesday. Mr Borodin left Switzerland on a plane bound for Moscow on Friday. (Reuters)

Putin visits base in rebel Chechnya

Moscow, April 14: Russian President Vladimir Putin flew to the rebel region of Chechnya on Saturday, as the scandal over independent NTV television again raged in Moscow.

A Kremlin spokesman said Mr Putin flew into Chechnya by helicopter from the neighbouring region of Dagestan and was now at the military base of Khankala outside the regional capital Grozny. RTR state-run television said that before landing in Grozny Mr Putin visited the area in central Chechnya where 84 Russian paratroopers died in a battle with separatist rebels a year ago.

Interfax television said that Mr Putin also visited a Russian commando group deployed near the village of Khatumi. Itar-Tass news agency said defence minister Sergei Ivanov, interior minister Boris Gryzlov and mass media minister Mikhail Lesin were accompanying Mr Putin on his trip.

The visit took place hours after a

takeover of NTV's headquarters by its new managers, appointed earlier this month by a new board of directors but largely rejected by the station's journalists.

The journalists say that the takeover bid by the state-run gas monopoly Gazprom, which claims to hold the majority stake, was part of the Kremlin's plan to clamp down on independent media. Some of NTV's defiant journalists quit the company and continued broadcasting under its logo on another television channel.

The old NTV managers have said that their attempts to contact Mr Lesin or Mr Putin had failed. Mr Putin has shrugged off suggestions that he should interfere in the NTV crisis, saying it was a purely commercial row.

The intervention by NTV's new managers ends a tense two-week stand-off with staff, a dispute barely covered by state media who were quick to pronounce Mr Vladimir Putin's Chechnya visit "the main news of the day."

(Reuters)

RUSSIA / JOURNALISTS STAGE WALK OUT

Putin Govt. takes over private TV

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, APRIL 14. Russia's only private nationwide TV channel has come under Government control when Interior Ministry troops replaced NTV security guards early on Saturday, making it possible for a new pro-Kremlin management to take charge.

Journalists arriving for work on Saturday were allowed to enter the building only after signing a statement agreeing to recognise the new management.

The takeover came two weeks after the state-run natural gas monopoly, Gazprom, ousted NTV's top officials at a shareholders meeting taking advantage of the channel's debts to Gazprom. NTV journalists refused to comply with the decision, citing numerous violations of the law and Government pressure on courts. They appealed against the NTV takeover in an arbitration court which is to hear the case next month, and continued to broadcast until being ousted by the new management on Saturday.

After the takeover, at least 35 of NTV's most prominent journalists walked out and began broadcasting news on TNT, a smaller cable channel operated by NTV's parent company Media-Most.

The NTV seizure has triggered a major political scandal in Russia, with liberal politicians accusing the President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, of muzzling the press. Over the past two weeks, thousands of people demonstrated in support of NTV in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other major cities of the country.

Mr. Putin has all along insisted the conflict over NTV was a purely commercial dispute between its shareholders.

The director of the state-run RTR television, Mr. Oleg Dobrodeyev, resigned on Saturday in protest against the seizure of NTV by force.



Journalists of the embattled independent NTV television station, Mr. Viktor Shenderovich (left), Ms. Tatyana Sorokina and Mr. Ernest Matskyavichus sit in the Ekho Moskvy broadcast studio in central Moscow during an interview on Saturday. — Reuters

Mr. Dobrodeyev, one of the founders of NTV and its former director, announced his resignation at the channel's headquarters where he had come during the takeover fearing that the situation could develop according to the worst possible scenario. At the same time, he criticised the old NTV management for aggravating the crisis by refusing to seek compromise with the Government.

The Kremlin appears to have hurried to end the stand-off over NTV before the arbitration court could hear the case in order to discourage the U.S. media tycoon, Mr. Ted Turner, from buying a minority stake in NTV from its founder, Mr. Vladimir Gusinsky, who is now exiled in Spain. Mr. Turner had earlier said he was in talks with Mr. Gusinsky to acquire 36 per cent of NTV shares.

Russia has halted slide: Putin

FROM MARTIN NESIRKY

Moscow, April 3 (Reuters): President Vladimir Putin said today Russia had halted a slide into political disintegration but now needed new measures to stabilise an old-style economy still scrambling up the slope.

In his annual state of the nation address, the 48-year-old Kremlin chief said Moscow was withdrawing troops from rebel Chechnya after achieving its main goals but warned against complacency and said the threat of attacks was still high.

"The disintegration of the state, mentioned in the last address, has been arrested," Putin told parliamentarians in the Marble Hall, a grand Kremlin venue

long used by the Soviet Communist Party for Central Committee meetings.

He also called for European integration and criticised Nato in a 63-minute speech in which he failed to mention several topical themes including ties with the US, military reform and media freedom.

As Putin spoke, state-dominated gas giant Gazprom ditched managers of the only nationwide independent television network, NTV.

Its journalists vowed to ignore the move and police trucks had reportedly gathered near the station.

NTV sees politics. Gazprom says it is recovering debts.

After painting a broad picture of the political stability he had worked to achieve in his first year in office, Putin devoted much of his corporate-style speech to economic, social and legal reforms. He made clear there was much work to do. "People's standards of living are still very low," he said. "We still have serious risks, both economic and social."

He said the political changes had taken place against the background of favourable economic indicators last year. But economic



Putin

stability this year was relative — too closely tied to commodities and the vagaries of world markets.

"In the last few months the worsening state of several economic indicators raises concern," Putin told members of the State Duma lower chamber and Federation Council upper house.

Underscoring Russia's continuing reliance on raw materials, metals producer Norilsk Nickel said it had approval from Putin to ship platinum and rhodium to world markets, and that its 2000 net profit could rise to \$1.7 billion from \$531 million in 1999.

Delays in signing the decree sent platinum to 13-year highs and palladium to all-time highs in January.

THE ODYSSEY OF MIR

THE FLAMING AND spectacular splashdown of Russia's Mir in the southern Pacific writes the last chapter of a truly magnificent space history spread over fifteen years since it was launched in 1986. Such a prolonged presence of Mir in the void of space which had housed Russian and U.S. astronauts for extended periods for observation and study of the cosmos should be ranked along with the other achievements of the twentieth century. Mir, orbiting at an altitude of 400 kilometres, should have recorded its observations from its vantage point in space and these should have been well preserved for facilitating further research long before the space station plunged into the Pacific. Well thought-out attention must be given to the extensive publicising of the material gathered by Mir and access to the same must not be restricted to just a few privileged cosmonauts and scientists. It should not be forgotten that the Mir could remain so long in space only because of the support it was given by the Russian taxpayers. The decision to bring it down was taken not merely because Russia was running out of money but for other technical reasons as well.

The Russians are not happy over having to play a subordinate role in the 16-nation international space station which the U.S. would be dominating because of their no longer being in the same position they had reached after the launching of the Sputnik in 1957 and Yuri Gagarin stepping out as the first space man. The Mir itself had to be repaired after the ramming of a cargo vessel, Progress M-34, and the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had to play a major role in repairing it. While this would not have pleased the Russians, it should also have made them realise that such emergencies which space programmes would run into would have to be taken into account and could be much handled much better with

international cooperation. Though ploughing a lonely furrow in space would raise the prestige of a country, enlisting the partnership of other nations should not be grudged as it is an act of sportsmanship.

If the Russians are now sorry that the disabling of the Mir had left them with no choice but to abandon it, they should realise that its fifteen-year stay in space actually is a bonus as it is five times longer than what was initially hoped for. This should throw much light on the engineering required for ensuring the sturdiness of a space station. Among the relatively later arrivals here is the composite fibre which imparts strength while keeping down the weight of planes and space vehicles. The demands for sustaining the knowledge which is unfolding itself rapidly at the existing levels and making further headway will have to be met by teaching and training scientists, engineers and technologists in much larger numbers than at any time earlier. The fall-out here has been the opportunities which Indian scientists and engineers have gained for carrying out space research in India and the U.S.

The long sojourn of Mir in space should have advanced knowledge at all levels, principally the medical science for studying the rigours of the spacemen who had lived in it for prolonged periods. The Mir takes its place among the achievements which the twentieth century had witnessed starting with the invention of the aeroplane by the Wright Brothers, Einstein's Theory of Relativity which revolutionised space perceptions, the deep sea exploration by Jacques Piccard, the ascent of Mount Everest which had defied mountaineers for a long time and the landing on the moon. With the accelerated advance of science and technology, the present century should be poised for much bigger leaps.

THE HINDU

26 MAR 2001

Checkmated in Chechnya

THE WEIRD hijacking of a Russian airliner by three Chechens in Turkey a week ago underscored that Chechnya has again become a quagmire for Russia. The hijack was nothing but an act of desperation: a Chechen cripple unable to move without crutches and his two teenaged nephews armed just with knives stood no chance of success and it was entirely due to the incompetence of Saudi commandoes that three people got killed during the storming of the airliner at the airport of Medina.

That such "rebels" have started seizing airliners shows the intensity of hatred Chechens feel for Russians after years of war to crush Chechnya's separatism. Between 40,000 and 60,000 Chechens were killed in the first war in 1994-1996, which resulted in Russia's ignominious withdrawal from the rebel region. The second war, launched in October 1999, has so far met with about as much success. Even after the 100,000-strong Russian forces occupied the whole of tiny Chechnya their control of the region has been nominal.

With their mountain bases destroyed by Russian troops, rebels have mixed with the civilian population across Chechnya and have been running a deadly guerilla campaign. Russia still keeps about 80,000 troops in Chechnya — enough to put a soldier in every Chechen house — but at night, troops barricade themselves in garrisons while the rebels move around freely.

Federal troops tend to regard all Chechen males aged between 10 and 60 as potential militants and routinely detain them. Many are tortured and some "disappear". The human rights group, Memorial, said last week that most of the bodies found in a mass grave near Grozny recently appear to be those of Chechen civilians detained by federal forces and summarily executed. Russians believe that virtually all pro-Moscow Chechen militia are actually armed rebels in disguise, ready at any moment to shoot them in the back.

Violence breeds more violence and hatred. Russian troops are the targets of daily rebel attacks and ambushes. According to official figures, about 2000 soldiers have been killed and nearly 5,500 wounded in the second Chechen war, and the toll grows by the day.

Two weeks ago, the Russian command began a partial pull-back of army units from Chechnya as part of a plan to hand over responsibility for the region from the Defence Ministry to the Federal Security Service. The Army is pulling out heavy armour and ar-



Russian soldiers look on as a Chechen they 'detained and searched' struggles to get up.

The recent hijacking of an airliner has underscored that Chechnya has again become a quagmire for Russia, says VLADIMIR RADYUHIN.

tillery for which it has no use as organised rebel resistance has been crushed. Moscow said it was now up to special anti-terrorist forces to hunt down the remaining rebels. Fighting is expected to flare up in Chechnya this spring once the trees turn green again.

The Chechen war, which catapulted Mr. Vladimir Putin to presidency a year ago, has now turned into a painful thorn in his side. It is a major obstacle to his plan for closer political and economic integration with Europe, which accuses Russia of massive violations of human rights in Chechnya.

Broad public support for the Chechen war in Russia is also fizzling out, with the majority of Russians favouring the economic "carrot" over the military "stick" in dealing with Chechnya.

Chechnya's economy has been completely ravaged by years of war. Unemployment runs at 90 per cent of the working-age population. For many Chechens waging war against Russians is just a way of earning a living. Rebel leaders, who get generous funds from some Arab countries, have set a price tag on every act of sabotage, paying up to \$200 for a army truck blown up and 15 sheep for a Russian soldier killed.

In an interview last week, Mr. Putin acknowledged that economic and social revival of Chechnya was the only way to end violence in the region. "Do you think they set up mines on ideological grounds?" Mr. Putin queried. "They have nothing to eat and nowhere to work."

The Russian Government has set aside 11 billion roubles (\$380

millions) for Chechnya's rehabilitation this year. This is not much, considering the scale of devastation in the region, but the main problem is that the money is stolen the moment it reaches Chechnya. An investigation showed that nearly all federal subsidies to people whose houses were destroyed in the first Chechen war ended up in the pockets of rebel leaders. Another lucrative business rebels used to run was to blow up new construction and split the money earmarked for them with local authorities.

To avoid falling in the same trap, Moscow has appointed a Russian to head the Chechnya Government and has made Federal Ministries responsible for supervising various industrial and agriculture programmes in Chechnya. But large-scale economic rehabilitation cannot begin until the level of rebel activity has been drastically curbed. Which seems impossible to do without offering Chechens jobs. Which brings us back to square one.

Serial blasts rock Russia

■ Up to 13 dead in planned terrorist strikes across the southern parts

REUTERS

MOSCOW, MARCH 24

Up to 13 people were killed and at least 90 wounded on Saturday in three separate bomb attacks in southern Russia, local police and officials said.

Security chiefs informed President Vladimir Putin of the blasts, which occurred on the eve of his summit in the Siberian city of Irkutsk with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, the RIA news agency reported.

"It would appear that planned terrorist acts have taken place. They all occurred around the same time," Interfax news agency quoted a spokesman for senior Kremlin aide Sergei Yastrzhembsky as saying. Prosecutor General Vladimir Ustinov has taken personal control of criminal investigations into the explo-

sions, Interfax reported.

Ten people died when a car bomb ripped through a market in the town of Mineralnye Vody in the Stavropol region, which borders rebel Chechnya, a duty officer at regional police headquarters told Reuters by phone.

According to the office of the Kremlin's envoy to the region, Viktor Kazantsev, 11 people died in the blast, which happened at around 10:00 a.m. (0700 GMT), Interfax said.

Itar-Tass news agency said more than 80 people had been injured in the explosion. Two police officers were killed when a suspect car they were inspecting exploded in the town of Cherkessk, in the neighbouring Republic of Karachayev-Cherkessia, Interfax reported citing local police. "They (police) cordoned off the area and got civilians out of the way and

Quake hits Japan

TOKYO: AT least two people were killed in Japan on Saturday and more than a dozen injured when an earthquake measuring 6.4 on the Richter scale rocked the West of the country, local fire department officials said. The officials said that an elderly woman died when her home collapsed and a 50-year-old woman was killed when she was hit by a falling balcony. No details of the injured were immediately available but the officials said that at least four homes caught fire after the earthquake and several people were trapped in elevators.

started to examine it (the car) more carefully," regional police spokesman Igor Pogosov told NTV television.

THE ASIAN AGE

25 MAR 2001

Hijack victims return to friends and family

BY ANGELA CHARLTON

Moscow, March 18: Passengers who survived a bloody 22-hour ordeal aboard a hijacked Russian jetliner returned home on Saturday from Saudi Arabia to tearful greetings from anxious friends and relatives in Turkey and Russia.

A Russian government airliner returned 131 people, most of them Russians, to Moscow's Vnukovo airport — their destination on Thursday when their flight from Istanbul was hijacked by Chechens apparently trying to call attention to what they call Russian atrocities in the rebel region.

Saudi special forces stormed the plane on Friday in Medina after the hijackers said they would blow the plane up. A Russian flight attendant, 27-year-old Yulia Fomina, and a Turkish passenger, 27-year-old Gursel Kambal, were killed along with one of the hijackers.

"I'm so glad to see you, I don't know what to say," said Valentin Malofeyev, greeting his tearful wife Olga, one of the passengers, with five pink roses. Stewardess Svetlana Ivaniva's six-year-old son Pasha, who wasn't told about

the hijacking, clutched his aunt's leg and asked, "When will mama come out? I want to see mama."

Russian officials praised the crew who locked the hijackers out of the cockpit by holding a broken door handle while the hijackers chopped at the door with an ax. "If the crew had acted differently, things could have been worse," said first deputy prime minister Valentina Matvienko.

Pilot Nikolai Vinogradov said he feared the hijackers would force them to fly to Afghanistan, whose Islamic government is an international outcast. He said one hijacker said, "We need you too," to the barricaded crew.

"But we knew it wouldn't stop with that and that they wanted to head for Kabul," the Afghan capital, Mr Vinogradov said.

Turkish passengers were flown to Istanbul. "We have lived through a dark time. They were going to kill us all," said Baki Kabak, his voice choking with emotion. Slain passenger Kambal's relatives expressed outrage. "It was the stupidity of the Saudi police," said Mehmet Kambal, an uncle. (AP)

THE ASIAN AGE

19 MAR 2001

Saudi forces storm plane, end hijack

Riyadh, March 16

SAUDI SPECIAL forces today launched an assault on the Russian plane which was hijacked by Chechens yesterday and arrested three hijackers who had commandeered the plane to Medina, a Saudi official and a Russian diplomat said today. The hijackers were demanding end of Chechen war.

"Saudi special forces launched an assault on the plane and a thick cloud of smoke came from the aircraft... I saw an ambulance racing away from the plane towards a field hospital set up on the airport tarmac," the official said.

The Vnukovo Airlines plane, a Tupolev-154, was carrying 162 people when it was hijacked by the armed Chechens after takeoff from Istanbul yesterday. They forced the pilot to take the plane to Medina in Saudi Arabia.

Turkey said the attackers had stabbed one person.

Yesterday, the hijackers freed a group of children, women and elderly men. Shortly after that 15 people escaped plane from a rear exit, the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported.

Ali al-Khalaf, director of Saudi Civil Aviation, said earlier the hijackers had released more than 20 women and children. Two more passengers were released today. A Russian diplomat said the Saudi negotiators were demanding freedom for all women and children aboard the plane, parked at a remote area of Prince Mohammed bin Abdel Aziz airport in Medina.

Earlier today, the hijackers demanded that the plane be given enough fuel for a long flight, Medina airport police said. "The hijackers have asked for the aircraft to be filled with fuel for a range of 5,000 km," said a police officer. According to the airline,



A passenger receives treatment at the Medina airport after being released from the hijacked TU-154 Russian plane

AP PHOTO

the hijackers demanded an end to Russia's military campaign in Chechnya.

"We still have no information about the nationality of the hijackers, whether they were Chechens or of some other nationality, but we are guiding ourselves by the fact that one of the demands of the hijackers was an end to the war in Chechnya," said chief executive Alexander Klimov.

A pro-Chechen news agency, which says it is the outlet for statements by separatist forces in Chechnya, said rebels fighting

Russian rule were not linked to the hijack.

"The official structures of Chechnya do not have any links to this incident," said a statement issued by Chechen-Press in the Georgian capital Tbilisi. "Hostage-taking and blackmail are not our way of fighting."

Russia is waging its second military campaign in breakaway Chechnya in four years, fighting mainly Muslim rebels. During the first war, pro-Chechen gunmen linked to the rebels briefly hijacked a boat off the Turkish coast in 1996.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 APR 2001

Ready for the worst, hoping for the best

HD-16
14/11

WITH LESS than a week to go before the U.S. President-elect, Mr. George W. Bush, is sworn in, Moscow is bracing itself for tough, but hopefully productive dealings with the new Republican Administration.

Mr. Bush's cold-eyed foreign policy team has signalled that Washington will adopt a hard line on Russia. Ms. Condoleezza Rice, National Security Adviser and an expert on Russia, has promised to break with the Democrats "failed" policy of trying to engage Russia and pursue American interests without hectoring and bluster. The new Defence Secretary, Mr. Donald Rumsfeld, and the Secretary of State, General Colin L. Powell, are both ardent supporters of deploying a National Missile Defence, vehemently opposed by Russia and China.

Yet, Moscow hopes to hammer out a constructive, if stiffer, relationship with the Bush administration. The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, said he did not expect relations with America to deteriorate. "My analysis of modern history shows that when Republicans were heading the U.S. administration, U.S.-Soviet relations were not harmed," he said. "We always managed to find a common language with the Republicans."

Analysts recall that it was during Republican presidencies that detente began (under Mr. Richard Nixon) and the Cold

Moscow is bracing itself for tough, but hopefully productive dealings with the new Republican Administration, writes
VLADIMIR RADYUHIN.

War ended (under Mr. Ronald Reagan). Those examples, of course, date back to a time when the Soviet Union was a power to reckon with. The new Bush Administration dismisses Russia as a declining power with rusting nuclear stockpiles. The Republicans, who traditionally rely on balance of power politics, may be even less inclined to take Russian interests and concerns into consideration than the Clinton Administration.

Hence, under Mr. Putin, Moscow has vigorously pushed to establish new and revive old alliances and relationships that should re-establish Russia as a world player. Russia has cemented strategic tie-ups with India and China, moved to reopen defence cooperation with Iran, Libya and Cuba, and revitalised its policy in Europe.

As it prepares to deal with the new U.S. administration, Moscow pins hopes on the trademark pragmatism of the Republicans. It is felt that Mr. Putin and Mr. Bush, both pragmatic leaders, can reach a better understanding on the basis of upholding their own national interests than the romantics, Mr. Boris Yeltsin and Mr. Bill Clinton, did in stressing common liberal values.

Both sides have emphasised the importance of the strategic arms agenda for their relations. "We intend without delay to start a serious dialogue with the new American administration on the entire range of disarmament issues, including the retention of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM)," the Russian Foreign Minister, Mr. Igor Ivanov, said in a New Year interview.

Analysts believe that agreement is possible even on the thorny issue of the NMD, which Washington wants to build to protect America from

possible attack by so-called "rogue states." Moscow says American fears are exaggerated and has threatened to walk out of all arms accords with Washington if the latter scraps the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. At the same time Russia has kept the door open for compromise. Even before a winner emerged in the U.S. presidential race, Mr. Putin agreed to examine all issues related to the ABM treaty, which the U.S. wants to amend to lift a ban on missile defences, while Russia's strategic rocket force commander suggested that Moscow could live with the NMD if its deployment was compensated by proportionate cuts in the U.S. offensive capability to preserve the strategic balance.

Mr. Putin has put forward a novel approach to strategic arms control as well. He proposed that further reductions in Russian and U.S. nuclear arsenals to the level of 1,500 warheads for each side could be carried out either together, through traditional negotiated treaties, or in unilateral cuts. This initiative tallies well with Mr. Bush's election campaign promise to go for unilateral nuclear arms reductions.

Russia is also encouraged by indications that the Bush administration may be less interventionist in hotspots around the globe than Mr. Clinton has been. Moscow, which furiously opposed the U.S.-led NATO strikes against Yugoslavia, cheered Ms. Rice's criticism of the American involvement in the Balkans and welcomed Mr. Bush's suggestion that the U.S. should pull out of the Balkans altogether.

Moscow is hoping a more isolationist U.S. will be less eager to push for NATO expansion into Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and will slow down its push for influence in the former Soviet republics, which Russia regards as a zone of its vital interests.

In the final analysis, Russia will stand to gain from the change of guard in the White House; said Mr. Sergei Karaganov, a political scientist. The Bush policy will be more realistic toward Russia. The countries will not be adverse but will not try to be all either.



THE HINDU

14 JAN 2001